

PLAYSCHEMES AND JUNIOR ACTIVITY SCHEMES

Report of the Director of Education

SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 In the budget for 2002-2003, income targets were established for Playschemes and Junior Activity Schemes. (Paragraphs 5.2 - 5.5)
- 1.2 Arrangements were also agreed for free access for holders of a Recreation Passport and discounts for holders of the Passport to Leisure. (Paragraphs 5.5 - 5.7)
- 1.3 Concern has been expressed by a number of parents and local community groups about the practicalities of the discount scheme and the impact of these charges on low income families, and on opportunities for children. (Paragraph 5.9)
- 1.4 There are corporate underspends from 2001-2002, and consideration could be given to how this funding is used in relation to these schemes. (Paragraph 5.10)

RECOMMENDATION

2. To determine the priority to be given to meeting the income target for these schemes from 2001-2002 corporate underspends.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. Concern has been expressed about the impact of the proposed charges for Summer Playschemes and Junior Activity Schemes on low income families, and on opportunities for children.

Options Considered

4. Other than maintaining the status quo established in the budget for 2002-2003, no other options have been considered.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 5.1 The Council currently provides free access to holiday playschemes and junior activity schemes for 7 to 14 year-old children. Playschemes are organised during the Easter and Summer holidays for a six week period. Last year, playschemes were held at 19 centres across the city and over 2,500 children were registered. Children attend on a sessional basis and schemes are of a four hour duration. Junior Activity Schemes are available each week throughout the year and are held at nine different centres. Last year, over 2,000 children were registered and similar to playschemes, attendance is on a sessional basis for up to a three hour duration.
- 5.2 The budget strategy for 2002-2003 meant that the Sport and Leisure Service had to work within a 3% increase to its cost limit.
- 5.3 A number of developments totalled £86,000. These did not include potential staffing costs of £40,000 relating to these schemes to meet Social Services and OFSTED regulations.
- 5.4 To fund the developments and stay within the cash limit, it was necessary to find savings of £62,000. The budget strategy included savings on various activities and cost centres ranging in size from £1000 to £10,400. The budget ultimately set by the Council included an £8,000 income target for each of these schemes. The subsidy to the schemes would continue at a level of £338,000.
- 5.5 The income target for playschemes was to be met through the charges set out below. It was recognised that there would be an impact on low income families, and to overcome this the Recreation Passport and the Passport to Leisure schemes were extended. The actual charging structure was therefore established as follows:
- no charge for children from families holding a Recreation Passport;
 - a discount for families holding a Passport to Leisure, resulting in a charge per child per session of £1 for Playschemes;
 - a charge of £2 for Playschemes and 50p for Junior Activity Schemes for all others (both per session, per child).
- 5.6 Comparisons with similar schemes in other authorities showed that this was a much lower charge than elsewhere, generally speaking.
- 5.7 A Recreation Passport can be purchased for £4.75, is valid for one year and is available to a wide range of people on low incomes. It allows access to Playschemes and Junior Activity Schemes free of charge for up to five dependants. Holding a Recreation Passport to Leisure would also provide children with numerous other opportunities to use the Council's sports facilities free of charge.

- 5.8 The costs of collection are mainly opportunity costs of staff time, administration, and letters that have been sent out, rather than direct additional costs. Recruitment to these schemes has begun and three registration sessions have resulted in 63 Recreation Passports being issued. Over 1000 letters have been sent out to parents about the new arrangements and three further registration sessions are planned. It is also fair to say that a number of positive comments have been received from parents who believe that the scheme still offers good value for money.
- 5.9 Concern has now been expressed that the scale of the budget contribution may not justify the impact on children and their families, notwithstanding the budget situation in Sport and Leisure. Some parents and local community groups have also expressed their concern about the impact.
- 5.10 The Cabinet will be aware that there are corporate underspends in 2001-2002, and potential uses are being compiled for consideration. It would be possible to determine that these schemes should be first priorities for the use of underspends, thereby deferring implementation of any charges and reconsidering the position formally in the 2003-2004 budget process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6. These are set out in the report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7. None.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8. These relate mainly to the opportunity costs of staff time in the work carried out so far to implement this budget decision.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

9. None.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10. There is clearly an issue about access for some families to these schemes, notwithstanding comparisons with charges elsewhere, and the fact that in the budget process it was felt that the Recreation Passport to Leisure scheme would help to alleviate such problems.